

4.2.2.7 Cultural and Paleontological Resources

Preferred Alternative: No Action Alternative

Under this alternative, DOE would continue the existing and planned missions at NTS. Management of NTS's cultural resources follows the Programmatic Agreement between DOE, the Nevada SHPO, and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation. Any impacts to cultural or paleontological resources from these missions would be independent of the proposed action and would be addressed through separate NHPA, *American Indian Religious Freedom Act*, and *Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act* regulatory compliance procedures.

Consolidation Alternative

Modify Existing Tunnel Drifts and Construct New Material Handling Building at the P-Tunnel

The existing P-Tunnel is located in Area 12. Modification would result in ground disturbance of 29 ha (72 acres) on previously disturbed land. No new, undisturbed land would be used. The P-Tunnel is on Rainier Mesa, in Area 12. In 1990, DOE entered into a Programmatic Agreement with the Nevada SHPO and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation that has resulted in an in-depth cultural resources study of 11 percent of Pahute and Rainier Mesas. Additional surveys would be completed prior to construction on any currently unexamined tracts. This area is rich in cultural resources, including many archaeological sites. Construction of the proposed facility may affect some potentially NRHP-eligible resources. Recorded prehistoric sites in the area include quarries, lithic workshops, campsites, and rock shelters. Historic site types include remains of ranches and mines. Operation would not have an additional impact on prehistoric or historic resources. Some paleontological resources may also be affected by land disturbance during construction. Operation would not result in additional impacts to those resources.

The CGTO is an alliance of Native American groups that have ties to the land at NTS. This alliance has in the past requested and been denied access to Rainier Mesa. Consequently, no important Native American resources have been identified there to date. Oral histories indicate that some resources, such as ancestral campsites, are located within Rainier Mesa (NT DOE 1996c:4-169). Additional Native American resources such as archaeological sites, traditionally used plant and animal species, and rock art may be affected by both the construction and operation of the proposed facility. Consultation with interested parties during the *American Indian Religious Freedom Act*, *Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act*, and NHPA compliance process may identify some of these resources.

Construct New Plutonium Storage Facility

The new Pu storage facility would be situated in the northern portion of Frenchman Flat in Area 6, near the DAF. The operational land requirement for the proposed facility is 56 ha (138 acres). Some new construction would be necessary. Land to be disturbed during construction totals 58.5 ha (144 acres). A 1.6-km (1-mi) reduced-access buffer zone would be created around the facility.

[Text deleted.] In 1984, a Class III cultural resources survey was conducted across the 660-ha (1,610-acres) DAF site and no NRHP-eligible sites were identified. Although no resources were identified within the DAF project area, Frenchman Flat contains 49 sites that have been determined eligible for inclusion on the NRHP. Recorded prehistoric sites within Frenchman Flat include base and temporary camps, quarries, and lithic reduction areas. Identified historic resources include sites associated with nuclear testing and research. Additional unsurveyed lands necessary for the proposed facility may contain similar prehistoric or historic resources.

Impacts to resources could occur during construction of the proposed facility. Operation would not result in additional impact as it does not involve ground disturbance or increased activity. In addition, construction (but not operation) may have some impact on Late Pleistocene paleontological resources, should any exist within the acreage to be disturbed.

The CGTO has conducted surveys over portions of Frenchman Flat. The area is known to contain at least 20 plant species of importance to Native Americans. Additional project-specific consultations would be necessary to identify impacts to Native American resources resulting from the construction and operation of the proposed facility. Potential impacts include reduced access to traditional use areas and visual or auditory intrusions to sacred space.

Collocation Alternative

Modify Existing Tunnel Drifts and Construct New Material Handling Building at the P-Tunnel

Potential impacts under this option would be the same as the P-Tunnel discussion under the Consolidation Alternative.

Construct New Plutonium and Highly Enriched Uranium Storage Facilities

Construction of the proposed Pu and HEU storage facility would disturb 89.5 ha (221 acres) of land; operation would require 87 ha (215 acres). A 1.6-km (1-mi) reduced-access buffer zone would be created around the facility. The proposed location is contained within Area 6 near the DAF. Impacts to cultural and paleontological resources would be similar to those discussed under the new storage facility option of the Consolidation Alternative.

Subalternative Not Including Strategic Reserve and Weapons Research and Development Materials

Under this subalternative, facility and other resource requirements will be almost the same as the Consolidation and Collocation Alternative. Therefore, impacts to cultural and paleontological resources would equal those previously discussed. [Text deleted.]